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Gypsies integration - Education for all

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Abstract

The educational policies trend of Romania is to pursue equality in access to education and education for an active citizenship of Gypsies. This study is focused on a delicate problem of Gypsy population namely trying to find ways to integrate their. To achieve this research was used the theory of M. Howlett about stages that define the public policy cycle and practical steps of the process of solving problems: recognition of Gypsy issues, proposed solutions to solve issues, optimal solution for Gypsy and agreed solution implementation. These steps have been implemented to solve Gypsy ethnic group's problems from Cluj County

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1. Introduction

In our society Gypsies are frequently unrecognized; they have a different status being marginalized and severely judged by other people. In opinion of Arayici [1] Gypsies are “victims of misunderstandings, discrimination in all areas (particularly in socio-cultural and educational), they present a very negative image in the collective imagination” [1]. The current educational policy needs to be redeveloped to incorporate more effective and affirmative responses to Gypsy learning. It draws heavily on interviews with Gypsy families in an effort to give ‘voice’ to an under-represented community [2]. The complex research made by Myers and Bhopal [3] analyzes “children's perspectives of their engagement with the education process and how the strong Gypsy community played an important part in their understandings of safety and belonging”. Another author Kyuchukov [4] takes a close look at the educational situation of Gypsy children and especially on impediment that exist regarding their full participation in the educational process. He observed that the bilingualism of Gypsy

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children is either ignored or is seen as a handicap. There is little appreciation in mainstream education of Gypsy culture or Romani language [4]. They experience widespread prejudice and discrimination from the settled population [5].

The old paradigm of education for all and the selection by exclusion are replaced by a policy of conciliation. This policy has two priorities: education for all and education for each and every person. The main issue was the lack of education of Gypsies, so we cannot talk about public education and neglect Gypsy minority. In a democratic society education for active citizenship and awareness of Gypsy people has a major contribution to social cohesion. Should start their education begins in the family, in school and continue lifelong then.

The research aims to highlight and evaluate the key factors which contribute to the evolution of Gypsies children like: living and environmental conditions, financial resources of family, family role in children's education, the role and contribution of school in shaping the future adult.

2. Material and methods

This study involved a total of 87 Gypsies adult, 127 Gypsy ethnic primary and secondary school students and gypsy counsellors on educational issues from three studied regions of Cluj County. The adult's age which had been participated to interviews or to the focus group discussions, were less than 40 years and the majorities (67%) were women because Gypsy men generally had refused to discuss their issues. To know Gypsy pupils opinions (belonging to primary and secondary schools) about education, have been distributed questionnaires with 20 items with dual choice. They had to express their opinion about: family issues, school education, learning, free time spending and how they help their parents. In this study we spoke with a number of 37 teachers who are teach in mixed classes (with Gypsy students too.)

The research was focused on the adaptation and use of M. Howlett theory on interpreting and solving educational problems observed in Gypsy ethnicity from urban (Huedin town) and rural (Gilău and Florești locality). The theory of M. Howlett about stages that define the Policy Cycle: A concept based on the understanding that, under normal circumstances, policy making is not linear, but a succession of stages and cycles without a clear starting point [6]. The classic strategy of Policy Cycle, described by Fritzen at al. [6], used a standardized variant of this tool which contain five steps: Recognition of issue (or Agenda setting), Policy formulation, Decision making (Adoption), Implementation and Evaluation.

3. Results and discussions

Based on discussions with representatives of Gypsies have been identified five main issues of Gypsy ethnicity in these localities. These issues were discussed in the focus groups and interviews and surveys in order to find the best solution for resolving their problems. The identified issues were focused on: the lack of equal opportunities to education for Gypsy children, poor life and family role in education, marriages between minors, lack of rights for Gypsy women and their inability to obtain a job after participation at training professional courses.

3.1. Lack of equal opportunities to education for Gypsy children.

Regarding to the equal chance in education for Gypsy children was identified one of the major obstacles, highlighted both by adults (parents and teachers) and children in their responses, namely poverty. Because of material deprivation 27% of Gypsy children from these localities they do not complete secondary school. In fact it is observed that they spin us into a vicious circle i.e. the parents have no education, thus they don't have jobs, so they do not have money to buy necessary supplies for school children. Therefore children early drop out school, so they will become unemployed adults. In case of children from rural area Gilău and Florești, they are studying in mixed classes that seem to be the right decision for optimal performance of the educational process.

The fact that, children are studying in mixed classes, is important for the integration of Gypsies in the community. They can make friends and sustainable relationships with their Romanian or Hungarian colleagues. However gradually they see that they are not marginalized or disregarded. Teachers showed the importance of Gypsies students integration in the mixed classes since early school years by involving them in activities both at school /class and extracurricular. In Huedin town Gypsy pupils also have the opportunity to study with Romanian students, but there is still a primary schools, located in the outskirts, called "Old Citadel" ("Cetatea Veche") where study just Gypsy students. Official language of instruction in "Old Citadel" school is Romanian, but at the same time students have the possibility to learn in Romani language. Parents of these students are satisfied with conditions in which their children are learning in this school. The building has been renovated and has modern classroom and bathrooms and qualified teachers dealing with children's education. Teachers of this school are Romanian ethnic. Parents motivated that they enrol their children reasoned that otherwise they would have to commute to school in Huedin, downtown, about 7 km away. For that plan to integrate this minority in educational level, and our country campaigning for equal rights and opportunities proper education of the young generation, it is not recommended that students study in separate schools for Gypsy ethnicity.

It have been analyzed the versions for solving issues regarded on the real chances of Gypsy children to education. One way of solving is poverty eradication, but it is a high goal hard to be realized in practice. One political Gypsy party "Roma Party ProEuropa Cluj" sent regularly (at intervals of 2-3 months) aids to these poor families, consisted in clothing, footwear and food. These aids are not sufficient they covered only a small part of the needs of those families. Another possibility is to collect money (donations) in educational institutions, these money being given to Gypsy families which are in difficulty. Most frequently common money was used for health and not like financial supplement to poor Gypsy families. The main solution is in the hands of the state, through educational policies which its support, thus it would be desirable that financial support to come from Ministry of Education like some scholarships that can benefit all Gypsies students who come from poor families.

3.2. Poor life and education in Gypsy families

One of the problems noticed as being very important in the formation and development of personality is related to the education of Gypsy children in the family. Unfortunately at this point have been reported major deficiencies regarding this type of education. The causes of these weaknesses are: lack of time necessary for mothers to care each child, stating that they have more children (3 to 13) of different ages. Has been noticed that: the mother is the only person from Roma families who's dealing with children's education. Another issue is learning by imitation, children consider that father is a model for life; unfortunately most of those parents are not role models to be followed because of their language or their deviant behaviour.

Most Gypsies are very poor, only 16% of adults taken in study receives social assistance from municipality, the social welfare is very small (under 300 Ron or 60 Euro/monthly) it does not cover 20% of the monthly expenses of a family. Some of Gypsies who work in other European countries manage to save and send money to those left at home. They argue that they are working to help their families, but the feedback we have seen on various media channels shown that many of them are begging or worse they commit illegalities. Many of the remaining Gypsies in Romania want to emigrate because their brothers who went to Ireland or Britain received substantial aid from the governments of these countries. Like structure they are a nomadic people, not as an excuse for their behaviour sometimes illegal, but only when we understand their behaviour we can achieve the real knowledge of their mentality. This refers to the evaluation of their real life issues, whose severity we realize only when we are in the midst of them. The precarious situation of the poor families, homelessness, lack of identity documents (many parents do not have birth certificates or identity cards) leads to a negative reflection of education in family.

Gypsy community is extremely reticent to the rest of the ethnic groups, they behave like a family that does not accept people from other ethnicities even after several preliminary analyzes. For example they do not accept to have intruders (like Romanian majority population) to their meetings considering that these are problems that

concern only them as a community. For this reason many of the issues that concern family education or problems with what poor families are dealing cannot be addressed or length discussed just with them.

3.3. *Marriages between minors*

After analyzing the responses to the questionnaire and the interview another identified problem was marriage between minors. According to the law, the marriage between minors is prohibited by the Civil Code [7] which specifies it in Article 272 first paragraph: "Marriage may be concluded that the spouses have reached 18 years old. The minimum age for marriage is established by law at 18 years". However the second paragraph of the same article stipulates that: "The minor who has reached 16 years old can marry using a medical certificate and with the parental consent" [7]. Already it is looming, by derogation at the norm a possibility of achieving the legal conditions of marriage between minors. In addition to the Article 294 it is specified: "Minor's marriage below the age of 16 is null and void" [7]. Again paragraph one of the Article 249 is cancelled by paragraph two "the nullity of marriage is regulated, if to the final judgment, both spouses are major (they are 18 years old) or if the women gave birth to a child or she is pregnant" [7]. Thus in gypsy ethnicity population from the rural localities studied, marriages between minors are frequent. According to this study it was found that the rate of these marriages is higher in rural areas, where are more "Coppersmiths", than in urban areas (Huedin). This fact raises the question: why Gypsies approve and even encourages marriages between minors? Responses to this question were multiple, so 38% of respondents denied the existence of such marriages; a ratio of 26% supported the existence of these marriages that maintained tradition and control of adults at the role of transfer of property and goods between families. A ratio of 19% said that they cannot be married with other ethnicities because in the most cases Gypsy are disregarded or they are treated with superiority by other people; there are also isolated cases in which their family accepted intermarriage. Small percentages, 17% believe that marriage can escape them by financial problems and help them to acquire the power of adult even if they divorce. This is stated in the Civil Code [7] in the 39 Article "minor after marriage acquires full legal capacity" and "if the marriage is annulled, the minor retains full legal capacity".

After assessing the situations described by 87 interviewed adults, being asked about marriages between minors was found that it can be several factors favouring these marriages namely: lack of adequate education, the pressure exerted by the community, tradition and economic considerations. Most often the young couple continue to live with their parents. Thus in one house with two or three rooms are living several generations of the same family.

3.4. *Women's rights in ethnic Gypsy group*

Aspects concerning on gypsy woman's life at family level are highlighted by Voicu and Popescu [8], in their opinion "family relationships are hierarchical, men are privileged, while women have an inferior status". These aspects have been revealed by this research and thus 12% of the interviewed women graduated high school and just 4% graduated a university. Teachers indicated that girls who are marrying early are forced to leave school, in this case they will give up to achieve their educational and professional aspirations. They even gave examples of women who could be students of a university but they were married at 16 years old and have become housewives. There were observed differences inside Gypsy communities, especially among "Gabor" and "Coppersmiths". In these environments woman is treated as an object belonging to the man, she must present unconditional obedience. A related example is the fact that she has to go on the street behind her husband and only man can take decisions in family. Although it seems hard to believe that in these families traditions are most important, so for example there is still in their habit the sheet dance from weddings, i.e. what is the proof that the bride is pure, otherwise the marriage is annulated and she is banished by her family.

In urban areas we assist to a certain emancipation of gypsy women and a breaking of tradition. In the last five years more and more Gypsy women want to study. That initiative is commendable; breaking the traditions is only for shaping an educated person. Gypsy women who graduate a high school or a university consider

education a priority and marry not until 23 years old, but they cannot be totally breaking out of their tradition. It is appreciated that young Gypsies have the desire to overcome their social condition and their attempt to combine tradition with formal education and lifelong learning.

3.5. *Inability to obtain a job after participation at training professional courses*

Facilitating access to training of Gypsies was done in these three cities through programs of developed, organized by: nongovernmental organizations (Association of Huedin Gypsies), local municipalities and Roma Party ProEuropa Cluj. These programs were developed modular, each course extending over a period of three months, totalling a minimum of 150 hours. After going through this training they received scholarships worth 500 Ron (110 Euro) a month and a diploma attesting their qualifications in different areas. Have been proposed training courses in the following areas: trade (112 students), protection and security (75 students), construction (56 students), manicure, hairdresser (56 students) mushroom grower (50 students). This initiative is worth appreciating, because it is very important to try to integrate them in society, and these training for young Gypsies want to do this. Unfortunately any of graduates from these courses has not found a job in accordance with the obtained qualification. Thus they have partially lost confidence in a decent job obtained through training. They want a job, something practical, adaptable for labour market. They expressed their wish to learn a trade from a potential employer who then can keep them in a job and they do not want to assist for hours of theory. For adult gypsy population is essential to have a job and a monthly income with which they to be able to support his family. There are sometimes preconceived ideas such as: Gypsies are lazy, violent, do not comply the law, prefer to obtain illegally money or property. Due to a bad image that they have created in time proves to be extremely difficult to realized professional integration and even social integration.

Conclusions

It is trying for Gypsies to facilitate their access to education so their children to have the opportunity to study for achieving a qualification. In this way they can avoid on adulthood the difficult situations such as poverty, lack of employment, homelessness and situations with what are currently dealing their parents. It is necessary that these children to be supported with scholarships and social support by competent forums. Unfortunately current value of social grants fails to cover more than a third of schooling costs not all students benefit from them. Even in Romania educational policies aimed: social inclusion, tolerance, responsibility, ability to use new information, education for active citizenship, lifelong education but all these do not have as a priority and facilitation the access of Gypsies to education. Educational policy regarding to Gypsies social integration, it is a long-term goal, there will not be immediate results, but surely there will be obtained positive results over years, when the current generation of children will become adults. Education is responsible for promoting the fundamental values of social inclusion, integration, tolerance, responsibility, social commitment, group cohesion, etc. Social cohesion of the group is required at all levels to ensure equal rights for all citizens unconcerned of ethnicity. We speak frequently of discrimination although all of us must fight for equal rights between Gypsy ethnic and Romanians. The solution to these issues consists in their access to education, social dialogue, and active participation in social life, economic, cultural, and in the processes of making decisions. Being known that educational policy decision on Gypsy ethnic group will be taken by politicians, this study only suggests certain means to solve these issues.

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